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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7844
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 2561
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002331

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;
USAID FOR AFR/WA (DALZOUMA)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2019
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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN NUGGETS -- DECEMBER 23, 2009

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission James P. McNulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Mission Nigeria provides the following compilation of recent political, economic, and social developments not previously reported.

NEW NIGERIAN COUNTER-TERRORISM UNIT

¶2. (C) Nigerian Army School of Infantry (NASI) Commandant Brigadier General Williams Obene told PolMilOff December 1 that the Nigerian military will stand up a new Counter-Terrorism (CT) unit called Counter-Force (CF) in Makurdi, Benue State, during the first quarter of 2010. The unit will initially consist of 42 soldiers, sailors, and airmen trained by USG Special Operations Forces during the last two Joint Combined Exercise Training (JCET) exercises in Jaji, Kaduna State. Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Abdulrahman Bello Dambazau and Defense Headquarters Training Chief Commodore Titus Awoyemi later confirmed Makurdi as the unit's future base of operations, despite earlier reports that the location would be in Bida, Niger State. Obene said the unit had no established training plans and has received JCET training only. According to the Defense Attache Office, several general officers at the Nigerian Defense Headquarters and Army Headquarters have expressed willingness to develop the Nigerian CT unit, but such willingness remains expressly conditioned upon U.S. commitment to provide material and equipment. In the meantime, all JCET participants returned to their presently-assigned military units pending formal CF establishment.

REGISTERED PARTIES REACH 57

¶3. (SBU) INEC Public Affairs Director Emmanuel Umenger announced December 22 the registration of three new political parties in Nigeria, the National Transformation Party (NTP), Democratic Front for a People's Federation (DFPF), and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), according to the press. With these additions, Nigeria now has 57 political parties (and counting) before the 2011 national elections. (N.B.: In comparison, 50 political parties participated in the 2007 national elections. END NOTE.)

CONCERNS OVER LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AT ECOWAS

¶4. (C) Development Partners (DPs) for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met in Abuja during the past

two weeks to coordinate and plan for the upcoming annual ECOWAS - DP Donors Conference scheduled for January 25 to 26, 2010. Spanish Ambassador Angel Losada Fernandez drafted a letter to ECOWAS President Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas on behalf of all DPs -- including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), UK Department for International Development (DFID), European Union (EU), Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Brazil, and Canada -- setting forth expectations for the conference. Spain, in its capacity as incoming President of the European Union (January to June 2010), planned to give an opening speech expressing DP frustration over lack of ECOWAS transparency, planning, and coordination. DPs, as part of coordination efforts with ECOWAS, for example, have requested copies of the 2009 and 2010 budgets and the 2009 annual report, but, according to Q2010 budgets and the 2009 annual report, but, according to both the French Ambassador and EU Charge, ECOWAS officials have ignored similar requests in the past.

INTRA-EU QUARREL

15. (C) Separately, an intra-EU dispute arose between the French and the EU over which country should lead ECOWAS DP coordination efforts. Following a similar meeting chaired by the EU last week, the French Ambassador convened a meeting of DPs December 21, which Spain and Sweden (which holds the current EU presidency until the end of December) boycotted. Swiss and Canadian diplomats told PolMilOff that the dispute resulted from power jockeying by the French, who reportedly held little confidence in Spain's ability to coordinate DP

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activities with ECOWAS. (N.B.: The EU collectively provides the largest amount of financial support to ECOWAS. END NOTE.)

ELECTION PLANNING IN KATSINA

16. (SBU) Katsina State Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Resident Electoral Commissioner Suleiman Bello Gusau told PolOff December 16 that many eligible voters from rural areas had not yet registered to vote because of prohibitive costs for them to travel to INEC registration offices. Therefore, he said, INEC officials planned to ask the state government to reach out to voters at the ward level and use continuous voter registration to ensure accuracy of the registration list. Gusau asserted that INEC sought to involve all stakeholders in the election process through public awareness campaigns, voter education workshops, and stakeholder meetings. Katsina Political Affairs Permanent Secretary Rabi'u Gambo told PolOff that his state wanted to ensure "hitch free" and transparent elections in 2011. He said the Secretary to the State Government chaired a committee on voter registration and planned to visit communities to encourage eligible voters to register.

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS EXPRESS CONFIDENCE IN FUTURE

17. (U) Fifteen Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University Student Union Government leaders and members told PolOff December 18 in Katsina that Nigeria has the population, national resources, and capability to move the country forward. While students acknowledged that their country's slow pace of development, most predicted that Nigeria would ultimately achieve progress. Students cited transportation infrastructure, power supply, and education as key factors that would shape their country's success. They expressed concern over climate change, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, and U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. They applauded the administration's new approach to engaging Muslim

communities and asked for more information about opportunities to study in the United States.

GON CRACKS DOWN ON SOME OPPOSITION MEDIA

¶18. (C) Agents of the State Security Service (SSS), Nigeria's intelligence agency, arrested and temporarily detained northern-based "People's Daily Newspaper" editor Ahmed Shekarau December 21 in connection to the newspaper's December 18 report on "Succession Tussle Heats Up in Aso Rock." The media company later called the arrest "an act of intimidation." (N.B.: Former Vice President, opposition leader, and Action Congress 2007 Presidential Candidate Atiku Abubakar funds the "People's Daily," which his Chief Press Adviser Garba Shehu publishes. END NOTE.)

¶19. (C) Separately, Vice President Jonathan Goodluck reportedly summoned Minister of Information and Communications Dora Akunyili and National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Director General Yomi Bolarinwa to explain the circumstances of an attempted GON revocation of the operating network license for DAAR Communications. Federal High Court Justice Adamu Bello ruled December 22 that the NBC had no constitutional power to revoke the network license issued to DAAR Communications in 2005. Bello ordered GON Qissued to DAAR Communications in 2005. Bello ordered GON officials to suspend all actions on revocation, suspension, or cancellation of DAAR's existing license. (N.B.: DAAR Communications owns Africa Independent Television (AIT), one of the most strident media critics of the Yar'Adua administration. Company Chairman Chief Raymond Dokpesi recently told Embassy Officers that the GON owed AIT more than 36.66 million dollars for its international broadcast sign services provided during the under-17 FIFA Football Championship in September in Nigeria. END NOTE.) (COMMENT: These GON missteps against some media critics have failed to dispel media speculation over the President's health and the ongoing succession tussle. END COMMENT.)

BOMB DISGUISED AS GIFT EXPLODES IN LAGOS

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¶10. (SBU) A bomb disguised as a Christmas gift for a Superscreen Television executive exploded during delivery at the television station's offices in Lagos, maiming the messenger. Police personnel recovered three additional explosive devices that the messenger had carried in a plastic bag before they could detonate. (N.B.: The President of Believers' Love-World or the Christ Embassy reportedly owns the television station. END NOTE.)

¶11. (U) The Embassy and ConGen Lagos collaborated on this telegram.

SANDERS